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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 ACDA-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 IGA-02 EB-08
/090 W
----------041029Z 019144 /14
R 040910Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4777
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
CINCPACFLT MAKALAPA HI
CINCPACAF HICKAM
CGFMFPAC CAMP H M SMITH SI
CDRUSACSG FT SHAFTER HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 2954

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, ASEAN, MARR, RP, UR, US
SUBJECT: U.S. MILITARY BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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REF: KUALA LUMPUR 0900

1. SUMMARY. THE SOVIET FACTOR IS NOT THE PRIMARY CONSIDERATION IN DECIDING WHETHER AND HOW TO MAINTAIN U.S. BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES. BUT TO THE EXTENT THAT IT IS A FACTOR AT ALL, IT WEIGHS AGAINST AN EARLY U.S. WITHDRAWAL, EVEN IF THE PRICE FOR STAYING IS FAIRLY

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STEEP. SEEN FROM THE MOSCOW PERSPECTIVE, THE ISSUE IS MORE SYMBOLIC THAN SUBSTANTIVE, BUT BOTH THE SOVIETS AND THE ASIANS ARE GOOD AT READING SUCH SYMBOLS. AND WE WOULD PREFER TO SEE SOME MOVEMENT TOWARD REDUCED SOVIET MILITARY ACTIVITY BEFORE SCALING DOWN OUR OWN FACILITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. REFTEL COGENTLY SETS OUT A NUMBER OF GOOD REASONS FOR THE U.S. TO CONSIDER WITHDRAWING, OR SUBSTANTIALLY SCALING DOWN, ITS MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES. WE DO NOT FEEL QUALIFIED TO COMMENT ON THOSE ISSUES WHICH CONCERN U.S.- PHILIPPINES BILATERAL RELATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES, AND WE ACCEPT THAT ANY U.S. POLICY DECISION SHOULD PLACE GREATEST EMPHASIS ON THOSE ISSUES.

3. TO THE EXTENT THAT THERE IS A SOVIET FACTOR IN THIS EQUATION, HOWEVER, IT WEIGHS AGAINST ANY MAJOR SHIFT IN OUR POSTURE, AT LEAST WITHOUT A COUNTERVAILING (AND HIGHLY IMPROBABLE) SOVIET CUTBACK. WE ARE NOT ACTIVELY WORRIED ABOUT A SOVIET MILITARY "THREAT" TO OUR INTERESTS OR THOSE OF OUR FRIENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA FOR THE PRESENT AND NEAR TERM FUTURE. BUT TO PARAPHRASE CHAIRMAN MAO, THE SOVIET UNION IS A RISING POWER MILITARILY, ESPECIALLY IN NAVAL STRENGTH, AND IT IS NARROWING THE GAP WITH THE U.S. ONE RESULT IS THAT THE SOVIETS ARE ABLE TO BRING MILITARY POWER TO BEAR, DIRECTLY OR BY PROXY, IN DISTANT PARTS OF THE GLOBE (E.G. ANGOLA) NOW MORE EASILY THAN EVER BEFORE. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE ARE WEAKER,
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BUT IT DOES MEAN THAT THEY ARE RELATIVELY STRONGER.

4. IN SOUTHEAST ASIA (EXCEPT VIETNAM AND LAOS) THE SOVIETS HAVE NUMEROUS DISADVANTAGES, INCLUDING THE WARINESS OF THE PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION TOWARDS MOSCOW. NEVERTHELESS BOTH THE SOVIETS AND THE ASIANS (INCLUDING THE MAJOR ASIAN POWERS, CHINA AND JAPAN) ARE VERY GOOD AT READING SYMBOLS, AND A U.S. DECISION TO LEAVE THE PHILIPPINES UNDER LITTLE MORE THAN MONETARY PRESSURE, WOULD BE SEEN AS A HIGHLY SYMBOLIC ACT HAVING IMPLICATIONS AT LEAST AS SIGNIFICANT OVER THE LONG TERM AS THE U.S. EVICTION FROM VIETNAM. FURTHERMORE, ASIAN WARINESS TOWARD MOSCOW COULD DISSIPATE FAIRLY QUICKLY IF THE WESTERN, MAINLY U.S., FACTOR WERE REMOVED AND IF LOCAL CONFRONTATIONS RESUMED.

5. THE SOVIETS WOULD BE DELIGHTED WITH A U.S. WITHDRAWAL AND HAVE PUBLICLY ENCOURAGED MANILA (AND BANGKOK BEFORE LAST OCTOBER) IN EVERY STEP IT TAKES TOWARDS RE-

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DUCING OR ELIMINATING THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE. WE
AGREE WITH REFTEL (PARAS 15 AND 16) THAT SUPPOSED
SOVIET OR CHINESE TOLERANCE OF OUR BASES IS NOT AN
ADEQUATE REASON FOR KEEPING THEM, BUT WE
WOULD ADD THAT MOSCOW, UNLIKE PEKING, HAS NEVER HINTED
THAT IT WANTS US TO STAY, EITHER AS A BULWARK AGAINST
CHINA OR AS A SUPPOSED TARGET FOR RISING LOCAL DIS-
CONTENT. THE SOVIETS WANT US OUT OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AND
THE SOONER THE BETTER. THEY ALSO WANT TO KEEP THE
(PEKING) CHINESE OUT, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, AND THEY
CRITICIZE SHARPLY ANY MOVEMENT TOWARD MILITARY COOPERATION
WITHIN ASEAN. THIS ADDS UP TO A PRESCRIPTION FOR VUL-
NERABILITY FOR THE NON-COMMUNIST STATES OF SE ASIA TO
SOVIET ADVANCES. WE SEE NO REASON TO MAKE MOSCOW'S
JOB ANY EASIER BY VOLUNTEERING TO WITHDRAW SOON.

6. WE DO NOT OPPOSE THE SERIOUS REEXAMINATION OF OUR
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POSITION ON THE BASE ISSUE--IN FACT WE ENCOURAGE IT.
BUT FROM OUR DISTANT PERSPECTIVE THERE ARE TWO OTHER
PLACES--NAMELY, SOUTH KOREA AND TAIWAN-- WHERE QUESTIONS OF
THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN ASIA SHOULD HAVE GREATER
URGENCY IN OUR THINKING THAN THE PHILIPPINES. THESE MATTERS ARE
INTERRELATED, AND A U.S. DECISION TO REMOVE OR REDUCE OUR MILITARY
PRESENCE IN TAIWAN AND SOUTH KOREA WOULD, IN OUR VIEW, MAKE OUR
BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES AND JAPAN ALL THE MORE
IMPORTANT, BOTH MILITARILY AND POLITICALLY. TO RAISE
DOUBTS ABOUT OUR STAYING POWER (OR INTEREST) WITH YET
ANOTHER ALLY WOULD BE TO COMPOUND THE UNCERTAINITIES OF
THOSE TO WHOM WE WANT TO SEEM CONSTANT--BOTH FRIENDS AND
ADVERSARY.
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